United Nations S/2016/840

Security Council

Distr.: General
4 October 2016

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2277 (2016), in which the Council requested me to report on the implementation of the commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.[1] It covers developments since the issuance of my report of 9 March 2016 (S/2016/232) and provides information on peace and security developments in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region until 20 September 2016.

II. Major developments

A. Political and security developments

2. Efforts to neutralize active armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), continued. With support from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) resumed operations against FDLR on 23 May. FARDC-led offensives, supported by MONUSCO, against ADF and affiliated groups continued in the Beni area in North Kivu. Unfortunately, those operations did not prevent ADF from committing atrocities in Beni on 13 and 14 August. Indeed, brutal attacks by ADF against civilian populations have continued, given that the armed group has managed to retain its capacity to launch deadly attacks, notwithstanding ongoing

[1] In this context, the region includes the 13 signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, namely, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. In addition, the following four intergovernmental organizations act as witnesses/guarantors of the Framework: the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and the United Nations.

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efforts by the Congolese army and MONUSCO to reduce its strength and area of operation. Operations were also conducted to dismantle some camps of the Forces de résistance patriotiques de l'Ituri.

3. The implementation of the Nairobi Declarations by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the former Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) made notable progress. Efforts by my Special Envoy, in conjunction with the representatives of the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, are detailed in section IV below.

4. On the political front, dialogue processes in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have yet to yield significant results. Further information on support for dialogue processes is provided in section IV below, under the activities of my Special Envoy. The situation in South Sudan improved slightly, following the return and appointment of Riek Machar as First Vice-President in April 2016. That improvement was short-lived, however, as the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition resumed fighting in and around Juba from 7 to 11 July. The clashes resulted in a high death toll, including of many civilians. Further details on the country's situation and ongoing efforts to resolve the crisis are provided in my most recent report on South Sudan (S/2016/552).

5. The President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, was sworn in on 12 May, following his re-election in February. Opposition leader Kizza Besigye was arrested and charged with treason for organizing a mock inauguration ceremony. He was released in July.

6. In Zambia, notwithstanding the holding of peaceful elections on 11 August, significant tensions were recorded during the campaign. On 15 August, the Zambian Electoral Commission announced that the incumbent President, Edgar Lungu, candidate of the ruling Patriot Front party, had won the election over his closest challenger, Hakainde Hichilema, of the opposition United Party for National Development.

7. The sixth Ordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) was held in Luanda from 11 to 14 June under the theme "Accelerating the effective implementation of the Pact and its Protocols for a more democratic and stable Great Lakes Region", with the President of Angola, José Eduardo dos Santos, serving as Chair. My Special Envoy briefed the Summit and the preceding ministerial meetings. During the Summit, a new executive secretary, Zachary Muburi-Muita of Kenya, was appointed to head the ICGLR secretariat. The Summit leaders called upon the United Nations to lift the arms embargo against the Central African Republic, urged all political actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in the political dialogue and reiterated their full support for the African Union Facilitator, Edem Kodjo. In addition, the leaders welcomed the resumption, in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, of the work of the National Commission for the inter-Burundian Dialogue, led by the East African Community, and encouraged the Government of Burundi and the opposition to commit themselves to the process. They also invited Burundi and Rwanda to resolve their differences through diplomatic means and took note of the willingness of the President of Angola to assist both countries in that regard.

8. The Summit leaders welcomed and pledged their support for the agreement between the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Uganda and

the United Republic of Tanzania to establish a joint follow-up mechanism to address the growing threat from ADF. Regarding FDLR, the Summit leaders urged the United Nations and other parties concerned to accelerate the repatriation to Rwanda, or the resettlement to third countries outside the region, of surrendered FDLR combatants held in cantonment camps in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The leaders endorsed the activities undertaken by the representatives of the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework with regard to the neutralization of negative forces and recommended sustained engagement with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and former M23.

B. Humanitarian situation

9. As noted in my previous report (S/2016/232), the influx of Burundian refugees into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania since April 2015 remains a matter of concern requiring urgent action. Notwithstanding efforts by United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners to deal with the refugee emergency in the region, several needs remain unmet. Considerable resources are required to deliver adequate assistance to the refugee population.

10. The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained very challenging, in particular in the east. Continued activities by armed groups and a reported increase in intercommunal tensions contributed to the displacement of 367,000 people in the first half of 2016, totalling 1.7 million displaced persons throughout the country. The eastern provinces also host the most refugees from neighbouring countries, totalling 388,000 people, originating mainly from Burundi, the Central African Republic, Rwanda and South Sudan. Moreover, a yellow fever epidemic spread to 7 of the country's 26 provinces. A cholera epidemic also continued to affect the population, mainly in eastern provinces and along the Congo River.

11. In Burundi, political instability and insecurity are increasingly disrupting livelihoods, in particular in Bujumbura. In that regard, humanitarian needs are increasing: 550,000 people are severely food insecure, 1.1 million people require protection and health services and 200,000 children require education assistance. Some 5 million people have contracted malaria since January 2016, more than double the number in 2015. Furthermore, more than 286,000 Burundians have fled to neighbouring countries and an estimated 108,500 are internally displaced.

12. Uganda saw a continued influx of refugees, including a growing number of arrivals from South Sudan. An average of 1,000 to 2,000 refugees from South Sudan arrive in Uganda every day, totalling more than 30,000 a month and exceeding the total number of 24,000 South Sudanese refugees that had arrived in the first quarter of 2016. As at 31 July, 42 per cent of the 568,400 refugees hosted by Uganda originated from South Sudan.

C. Human rights and judicial cooperation

13. International humanitarian and human rights violations were reported across the region. Those violations included the deliberate targeting of civilians and human rights activists, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention and the recruitment of children into armed groups. Violations of

international humanitarian norms and principles threatened the safety and security of communities, humanitarian workers and vulnerable civilian populations in affected areas. For instance, in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Zambia, there were reports of violence and human rights violations in the context of political dialogue, peace processes and elections. Such incidents call for more vigilance and action to protect the fundamental rights of all participants in political processes.

III. Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

A. Commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

14. Detailed information on the implementation of the national commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is contained in my reports on MONUSCO of 28 June 2016 (S/2016/579) and 30 September 2016 (S/2016/833).

B. Commitments of the region

15. Efforts by signatories to implement their regional commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework yielded mixed results, in particular with regard to the commitments relating to non-interference in the affairs of neighbouring countries; respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighbouring States and respect for the legitimate security concerns and interests of neighbouring States. While the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda held separate high-level meetings to address issues of mutual concern and improve bilateral cooperation, relations between Burundi and Rwanda soured amid claims and counterclaims relating to the presence of a large number of Burundian refugees in Rwanda. During a meeting of ministers for foreign affairs held in Luanda on 12 June, in preparation for the sixth Ordinary Summit of ICGLR, Burundi reiterated a request to task the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of ICGLR with verifying allegations of the recruitment of Burundian youth into armed groups in refugee camps in Rwanda. Those allegations and request were rejected by Rwanda, which argued that it had no interest in destabilizing Burundi and suggested addressing the issue bilaterally.

16. Other cases relating to cross-border infractions in the region were successfully referred to the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism. Among those cases was a tragic incident on Lake Albert on 21 May, involving the marine force of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Ugandan police. Three Ugandan police officers were reportedly killed and another one injured during an exchange of fire between the two sides. Unfortunately, the Mechanism could not investigate the incident, owing to a lack of funds and logistical supplies.

17. The foregoing notwithstanding, the leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda continued to strengthen cooperation and improve their relations. For example, on 4 August, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Joseph Kabila, paid a visit to the President of Uganda. The two leaders discussed, among other things, security issues, including ways to strengthen the fight against ADF. They agreed on a joint intelligence and security plan to fight rebel groups active along their common border. Furthermore, the President of the

Democratic Republic of the Congo and President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, met in the margins of the twenty-seventh Summit of the African Union, held in Kigali in July, and again in Gisenyi, Rwanda, on 12 August. During the meeting in Gisenyi, they agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation by boosting cross-border trade and energy production from the exploitation of methane gas in Lake Kivu. The two Presidents also agreed on the need to establish an intelligence-sharing mechanism to enhance security along their common border.

18. Progress was also made with regard to the regional commitment to facilitate the administration of justice through judicial cooperation. For example, in March, the Congolese authorities repatriated Rwandan Ladislas Ntaganzwa, wanted for his role in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The signatory Governments also showed growing interest in bringing counterparts together to share information and experiences on complex legal matters relating to judicial cooperation.

C. International commitments

19. On 21 March, the Security Council held an open debate on the maintenance of international peace and security and the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region, chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Angola, Georges Chicoti. On that occasion, I launched the United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework 2016-2017 to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. I also requested my Special Envoy to work with the Regional United Nations Development Group and country representatives of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to facilitate the implementation of the Framework and strengthen the nexus between peace and development in the region.

20. On 4 May, my Special Envoy participated in a meeting of the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes region in Stockholm. He shared his views on how the international community could support the ongoing political dialogue, facilitated by the African Union, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Participants expressed concern over shrinking political space, reported human rights violations and the arrest of members of the opposition. With regard to the dialogue on Burundi, the Contact Group commended the efforts of the East African Community Facilitator, the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, for relaunching the talks. Participants committed themselves to supporting the process and stressed that the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi remained crucial for peace and stability in the country.

21. On 20 June, the Office of my Special Envoy, the German Agency for International Cooperation, ICGLR, and the delegation of the European Union to Burundi met in Bujumbura to discuss finalizing a European Union-sponsored regional project worth 10 million euros that is intended to operate from 2017 to 2020. The project will support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the 2006 ICGLR pact on security, stability and development in the Great Lakes region in five areas: natural resource management, the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and resettlement or repatriation, judicial cooperation and capacity-building for the ICGLR Secretariat.

D. Oversight mechanisms of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

22. In an effort to enhance ownership by signatory States, the Government of Zambia hosted the thirteenth meeting of the Technical Support Committee of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, held in Lusaka on 13 May. The meeting reviewed progress made in the implementation of national, regional and international commitments and recommended an assessment of the Framework's implementation.

23. At the sixth Ordinary Summit of ICGLR, held in Luanda on 14 June, my Special Envoy provided an update on the guarantors' efforts to strengthen the governing structures of the Framework and enhance the signatories' ownership of its implementation. Summit participants endorsed the recommendations put forward, notably to delink the meetings of the Regional Oversight Mechanism from the General Assembly and the Summit of the African Union, and to have signatory States host annual meetings of the Mechanism on a rotational basis. This reform is intended to enable more focused meetings and improve decision-making within the Mechanism. The next meeting of the Mechanism is expected to be held in Luanda on 26 October 2016.

IV. Activities of my Special Envoy

24. My Special Envoy continued his good offices to help to neutralize negative forces in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. He also continued to support the dialogue process in the country and efforts to help to implement the Nairobi Declarations and promote democratic processes in the region. Furthermore, he and his Office took several initiatives to promote women, young people and civil society, promote durable solutions to refugee issues, facilitate the administration of justice through judicial cooperation and promote economic development in the region.

A. Implementation of the Nairobi Declarations

25. From 25 to 29 April, my Special Envoy led a team of representatives of the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda to engage the parties on the implementation of the Nairobi Declarations.

26. In Rwanda and Uganda, the delegation urged the leaders of the former M23 to uphold their commitments and submit to the voluntary repatriation process. It also encouraged the designated coordinator of the former M23 to participate in forthcoming meetings to be convened in Kinshasa by the National Oversight Mechanism and established by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The guarantors secured the necessary assurances, notably from the Congolese authorities, that delegates of the former M23 would not be arrested or intimidated while in Kinshasa.

27. Thanks to those efforts, two joint evaluation meetings were held in Kinshasa on 27 and 28 May and on 27 and 28 June between representatives of the Government and a delegation of former M23 led by its coordinator, Désiré Rwigema. The status of implementation of all the provisions in the Nairobi Declarations was reviewed

during the meeting in May. During the same meeting, officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior and the Congolese intelligence services discussed the status of implementation of the Nairobi Declarations with the former M23. The parties shared their perspectives on ways to overcome outstanding challenges, including those relating to an amnesty, the release of prisoners belonging to the former M23, the transformation of the former M23 into a political party, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and resettlement or repatriation and the repatriation of the former M23 elements still held in Rwanda and Uganda. During the meeting held in June, at the expert level, the guarantors encouraged the National Oversight Mechanism and representatives of the former M23 to maintain direct communication channels and to facilitate information-sharing and the organization of future meetings.

28. The faction of former M23 in Rwanda, led by bishop Jean-Marie Runiga, was registered as a political party in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 30 May, under the name "Alliance pour le salut du peuple". Reacting to that development through a communiqué issued in Kampala on 2 June, Bertrand Bisimwa, the ex-M23 political leader who signed the Nairobi Declarations, stated that no decision had been made to transform the movement into a political party.

B. Neutralization of negative forces

29. From 23 to 26 May, my Special Envoy and representatives of the other guarantors conducted field visits to Goma, Mavivi and Eringeti (Beni territory), Kanyabayonoa and Nyamilima (Rutshuru territory) and Munigi (Nyiragongo territory) in North Kivu in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The visits were intended to take stock of progress and the key challenges in the neutralization of negative forces, formulate recommendations to strengthen political and security measures in support of their neutralization, including steps to stem their illegal economic activities, explore ways to accelerate the repatriation of disarmed FDLR ex-combatants to Rwanda and show solidarity with local populations victimized by negative forces. The delegation engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, MONUSCO, the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism, community representatives and ex-combatants.

30. During the delegation's meeting with the Governor of North Kivu, Julien Paluku, the latter highlighted efforts made by FARDC, supported by MONUSCO, to eliminate negative forces. He requested that data collected by MONUSCO drones be shared with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to enhance operations against negative forces. The Governor highlighted growing tension between Nande and Hutu communities and the implications of such tension for long-term stability in the region. He also stated that the fight against FDLR was being complicated by the fact that FDLR combatants were allegedly sheltered and supported by Rwandan Hutu refugees in camps for internally displaced persons. He called for more efforts to be made for the biometric registration of Rwandan refugees.

31. The delegation conveyed its condolences to the people in Eringeti and Beni following a series of brutal attacks by ADF. It commended FARDC for leading the fight against negative forces under difficult conditions and reiterated the urgency of boosting joint operations with MONUSCO. It urged the local population to cooperate with FARDC and MONUSCO by sharing information on ADF activities. Addressing

ex-combatants of FDLR who had surrendered in December 2014 but who have opposed repatriation to Rwanda, the delegation urged them to cooperate without preconditions. It assured those ex-combatants of the international community's commitment to support a safe and dignified repatriation process.

32. On 30 May, my Special Envoy travelled to Luanda on a one-day visit to hold separate consultations with the Minister of Defence of Angola, João Manuel Lourenço, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. During the meeting with the Minister of Defence, my Special Envoy provided an update on the guarantors' initiatives towards eliminating negative forces. He also drew the Minister's attention to the difficult financial situation of the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism. My Special Envoy and the Minister for Foreign Affairs discussed the political dialogue in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and of ways to promote greater ownership of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework by signatories.

33. In the margins of the sixth Ordinary Summit of ICGLR, my Special Envoy and the President of Angola exchanged views on challenges in the neutralization of negative forces. The President welcomed the collaborative approach promoted by the guarantors' representatives and expressed his country's readiness to host the next meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism.

34. On 20 June, my Special Envoy travelled to Brazzaville to meet the President of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso. They discussed challenges relating to negative forces, dialogue processes in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and ways to facilitate the full implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. The President expressed his country's readiness to host a meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism in 2017.

35. Building on the outcome of the sixth Ordinary Summit, my Special Envoy and his Office and the ICGLR secretariat organized a meeting of ministers of defence of select States members of ICGLR and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Nairobi on 20 July. The meeting was chaired by the Minister of Defence of Angola, acting as Chair of the ICGLR ministerial committee of defence. Ministers of defence and senior representatives of Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania participated in the meeting, along with my Special Envoy, the MONUSCO Force Commander, the ICGLR Executive Secretary and officials from the African Union and SADC.

36. The ministers tasked the chiefs of defence staff of ICGLR and SADC States participating in the meeting with carrying out field visits to affected areas in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, notably to camps hosting ex-combatants. They also tasked them with consulting the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade and officials from the Democratic Republic of the Congo on ways to strengthen operations against negative forces. They also called upon the ICGLR secretariat to swiftly establish the joint high-level follow-up mechanism agreed to at its previous Summit to tackle ADF recruitment in the region. Other recommendations included a call upon the intelligence services of States directly affected by the activities of negatives forces in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to strengthen coordination and information-sharing.

37. In addition, the ministers called upon other States members of ICGLR and SADC to consider contributing troops to MONUSCO or its Force Intervention

Brigade in order to intensify operations against negative forces. They noted the importance of a comprehensive approach to eliminating negative forces that combined military and non-military measures. In that regard, the meeting highlighted the need to enhance awareness-raising and communications efforts to encourage more combatants to surrender.

38. The ministers encouraged my Special Envoy and the ICGLR Executive Secretary to convene a meeting on the illegal exploitation and trade in natural resources by armed groups. In that regard, at the meeting, the need to identify States, corporations and individuals that benefited from illicit economic activities by negative forces and to impose sanctions on them, in accordance with United Nations sanctions regimes, was noted.

39. On 2 September, the ministers of defence of Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania met in Kampala to address the growing threat posed by ADF. MONUSCO was represented at the meeting. The ministers emphasized the critical role to be played by ICGLR structures, such as the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism and the Joint Intelligence Fusion Centre. They also decided to establish a joint follow-up mechanism, to be headquartered in Kasese district, Uganda, and adopted its terms of reference. It was also agreed that an expert-level working group would meet in Kinshasa on 11 and 12 October to develop a budget for that mechanism and formulate a concept of operations. The ministers also recommended that simultaneous operations be conducted against ADF in all affected States.

40. The ministers encouraged the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its National Commission for Refugees to accelerate the biometric registration of Rwandan refugees in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, with support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They urged my Special Envoy and the ICGLR Executive Secretary to help to accelerate the voluntary repatriation of refugees, including through existing tripartite agreements.

C. Support for dialogue processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region

41. In line with Security Council resolutions 2211 (2015) and 2277 (2016), my Special Envoy advocated dialogue to promote timely, peaceful and credible elections in the region.

42. My Special Envoy, together with my Special Representative and Head of MONUSCO, continued to strive to enhance the credibility of the ongoing political dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 30 April, my Special Envoy and my Special Representative met representatives of the ruling coalition and the main opposition parties, namely, the Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social (UDPS), the Dynamique de l'opposition and the Groupe des sept partis politiques. Those consultations were intended to assess the parties' positions on the dialogue and assess what the international community could do to promote an inclusive process leading to peaceful and credible elections.

43. On 4 July, my Special Envoy and my Special Representative travelled to Addis Ababa to consult with the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African

Union, Smaïl Chergui, the African Union Facilitator and other partners. As a result, an international support group was established to support the Facilitator. It comprises representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie, ICGLR and SADC. It was also agreed that the United Nations and the International Organization of la Francophonie would second experts to assist the Facilitator.

44. Following the inaugural meeting of the international support group, my Special Envoy, the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union and the managing director for Africa of the European External Action Service, Koen Vervaeke, gathered in Brussels on 9 July to meet the Comité des sages of the opposition coalition, the Rassemblement des forces politiques et sociales de la République démocratique du Congo acquises au changement, chaired by UDPS leader Étienne Tshisekedi.

45. During the meeting, the opposition leaders reiterated their rejection of the dialogue, as proposed by the Government, but stressed their commitment to a dialogue as envisioned by the Security Council. They agreed, in principle, to having the dialogue begin shortly after July. They set some preconditions for their participation, however, notably a demand that the Government take confidence-building measures, such as releasing political prisoners, and end what they considered to be the judicial harassment of opposition figures. They also insisted that the international support group play a more active role in the dialogue. During a separate meeting with my Special Envoy in Brussels on 8 July, opposition leader Moïse Katumbi welcomed the strong involvement of the support group and reiterated the opposition's call for the dialogue to be conducted in accordance with the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Security Council resolution 2277 (2016).

46. The African Union Facilitator, supported by a small team of experts, continued his consultations to complete preparations and launch the dialogue. On 24 July, the Rassemblement released a statement rejecting Mr. Kodjo as Facilitator, accusing him of bias. In an attempt to defuse tensions and overcome challenges in the process, my Special Envoy and other members of the international support group visited Kinshasa from 2 to 5 August to consult the parties and the Facilitator.

47. During those consultations, the parties presented conflicting views on the dialogue. The representatives of the ruling coalition recalled the Government's outreach to the opposition, notably its extensive consultations with UDPS, the leading opposition party. The Government also chided the Rassemblement's rejection of the African Union Facilitator and urged the latter to immediately convene the dialogue's preparatory committee. For their part, the leaders of the Rassemblement reiterated their conditions for participation, namely, the release of political prisoners, the cessation of judicial harassment of opposition figures and a more central role for the international support group in facilitating the dialogue. However, some opposition leaders expressed their readiness to accept Mr. Kodjo as Facilitator if the other conditions set by the Rassemblement were met.

48. The international support group expressed its appreciation to the Government for its decision of 22 July to release some political prisoners. It insisted that creating a propitious environment for the dialogue would require additional confidence-building measures. It urged opposition parties to join the dialogue in earnest and reiterated its support for the African Union Facilitator. Notwithstanding those

efforts, Mr. Tshisekedi informed the support group on 4 August that the Rassemblement's rejection of the Facilitator was "irrevocable".

49. On 19 August, the Government announced the release of 24 political prisoners of the 26 whose names had been submitted by the opposition. According to the Minister of Justice, Alexis Thambwe Mwamba, the measure was intended to ease tensions with the opposition. On 20 August, the African Union Facilitator issued a communiqué inviting designated representatives of political parties and civil society organizations to the first meeting of the preparatory committee, to be held on 23 August. Consistent with its position, the Rassemblement declined to attend the meeting and called for a general strike the same day.

50. From 7 to 15 September, my Special Envoy travelled to the Democratic Republic of Congo and joined other members of the international support group to support the national dialogue, which had begun on 1 September in Kinshasa, with 285 participants representing the ruling coalition, a section of the opposition, civil society and the Catholic Church. Following two weeks of intense negotiation, participants agreed on the sequencing of elections and decided to hold presidential, legislative and provincial elections simultaneously. They also agreed to hold local elections, along with the presidential, legislative and provincial elections, provided resources were available.

51. Participants further agreed on a complete update of the voter registry, and several delegates pointed to the need for adequate funding of the electoral cycle. The Minister of Justice, who co-moderated the dialogue on behalf of the ruling coalition, stated that the Government would fully fund the electoral cycle, whereas the opposition requested international financial support. Other contentious issues remained unresolved, notably the extension of the President's rule beyond the end of his current, and last, term and the role of Parliament during a proposed transition. While in Kinshasa, the international support group continued to encourage senior officials from the Rassemblement to join the dialogue. Notwithstanding those efforts, the Rassemblement maintained its decision not to participate in the talks.

52. The dialogue faced a major hurdle on 19 and 20 September, when demonstrations staged by some opposition parties turned violent and clashes between police and demonstrators resulted in the death of dozens of people.

53. My Special Envoy met the President of the Congo in Brazzaville on 12 September at the latter's request. The President urged the international support group to help the parties to reach a negotiated solution and advocated additional confidence-building measures. Previously, on 6 September, my Special Envoy met the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union in Addis Ababa to further coordinate the efforts of the United Nations and the African Union. He also met his fellow envoys for and representatives of the Great Lakes region in Brussels on 16 September.

54. The crisis that erupted in Burundi, following the presidential election in 2015, continued. On 21 May, my Special Envoy participated in the resumption of the inter-Burundian dialogue in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania. The Government of Burundi, political parties and civil society organizations were present. My Special Adviser and senior officials from Belgium and the United States of America, as well as from the African Union and the European Union, were also in attendance.

The opening ceremony was followed by four days of consultations between the East African Community Facilitator and the parties.

55. Following that meeting, the East African Community Facilitator travelled to Brussels on 10 June to consult representatives of the opposition platform Conseil national pour le respect de l'Accord d'Arusha pour la paix et la réconciliation au Burundi et la restauration de l'état de droit. The Facilitator succeeded in bringing the parties back to the dialogue in Arusha on 12 July. However, the talks resulted in a deadlock, as the Government of Burundi denounced the presence of opposition figures who, it alleged, had been involved in the attempted coup against the President, Pierre Nkurunziza, in May 2015.

56. My Special Envoy took advantage of a visit to Bujumbura on 10 and 11 August to consult with the ICGLR secretariat and the United Nations Office to the African Union to convey messages on the dialogue process. During separate courtesy calls on the First Vice-President, Gaston Sindimwo, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alain Nyamitwe, my Special Envoy encouraged the Government to fully engage in the dialogue and support the East African Community Facilitator. He also called for an improvement in the relationship between Burundi and Rwanda. He took note of concerns expressed by the Government, including organizational challenges relating to the dialogue, and reiterated the readiness of the United Nations to continue to support the process. On 8 September, the Facilitator briefed Heads of State and Government at the seventeenth Extraordinary Summit of the East African Community, held in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania. The Summit endorsed the Facilitator's recommendations and directed the Council of Ministers to allocate a budget for the dialogue process.

D. Promotion of regional economic integration

57. As a follow-up to a conference on private sector investment, held in Kinshasa on 24 and 25 February, my Special Envoy continued to consult regional leaders and the business community to discuss next steps. On 16 May, he chaired the fifth meeting of the conference's steering committee, held in Nairobi on 16 May. Participants agreed to facilitate future conferences focusing on investors' interests, the needs of the region and the conclusions of the conference on private sector investment. It was also agreed that follow-up events should be spearheaded by the ICGLR private sector forum. On 20 May, my Special Envoy's team met officials from the Rwanda Development Board in Kigali for preliminary discussions on a follow-up investment conference, to be hosted by the Government of Rwanda.

E. Cooperation with regional partners

58. From 16 to 18 April, my Special Envoy attended a meeting of the Regional United Nations Development Group in Dakar to discuss the implementation of the United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework 2016-2017, of which the Security Council took note on 26 March. On that occasion, he stressed the need for United Nations entities to strengthen synergies and work together on cross-border initiatives to tackle the root causes of conflict in the region. He also encouraged regional coordinators and directors to commit existing resources to the Framework and establish a cross-border trust fund to receive donor contributions.

59. On 16 May, my Special Envoy travelled to Rome to attend the first Italy-Africa ministerial conference. The gathering enabled high-level participants to discuss issues of common interest, such as the efforts to combat extremism and economic and socioenvironmental sustainability.

60. From 28 June to 1 July, my Special Envoy participated in expert workshops on the Great Lakes region, organized by the Government of Switzerland in Geneva. Participants included 11 special envoys and senior officials representing various Governments, namely, Belgium, China, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States, and institutions, including the African Union, the European Union and the International Organization of la Francophonie. Participants reflected on the role of the special envoy and the operational and political challenges that they faced in discharging their mandates. They also noted the need to develop a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities, define common objectives and harmonize action in support of regional efforts. In addition, they highlighted the need to strengthen collaboration among special envoys and representatives.

F. Promotion of women, young people and civil society organizations

61. My Special Envoy continued to work with partners to promote women in the region. He convened the second face-to-face-meeting of the advisory board of the Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, held in New York on 21 March. Together with my Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop, he laid out a plan to strengthen the Women's Platform.

62. My Special Envoy convened a meeting in Goma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on 11 and 12 July to take stock of the progress made by the Women's Platform in assisting women at the grass-roots level through financial grants, capacity-building and empowerment initiatives. Participants deliberated on how to strengthen women's engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). In addition, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women facilitated a capacity-building session on policy development, conflict resolution and lessons learned from women's participation in peacebuilding. Participants adopted a declaration that underscored the plight of women and girls in the region and the urgent need for policies and action to attain durable peace, security and development.

G. Promotion of durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons

63. My Special Envoy and his Office has continued to work with UNHCR, the World Bank and other partners to develop new solutions to protracted displacement that safeguard the dignity of displaced persons and provide better opportunities, while providing greater support to host communities. His Office co-organized a two-day workshop, held in Nairobi on 6 and 7 June, on local integration as a solution to displacement. Government officials from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, all of which

host large numbers of displaced persons, shared their perspectives and experiences on local integration as a solution to long-term displacement. The meeting confirmed growing interest, in the region and beyond, in devising innovative solutions for the millions of displaced persons in the Great Lakes region.

H. Judicial cooperation and efforts to combat impunity

64. In order to strengthen judicial cooperation and tackle impunity in the region, my Special Envoy and his Office and the ICGLR secretariat organized a two-day conference in Nairobi on 19 and 20 April. The meeting built on the growing awareness that regional judicial cooperation was necessary to combat impunity, a key commitment under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. For the first time, the directors of prosecution and investigation services from Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda and Zambia came together to examine obstacles to judicial cooperation in the region. The experts formulated recommendations for a practical approach to judicial cooperation to address various crimes, including sexual and gender-based violence, terrorism and crimes relating to the illegal exploitation of natural resources.

65. My Special Envoy and his Office supported a gathering in Entebbe, Uganda from 7 to 9 July of more than 40 experts, under the auspices of the ICGLR regional training facility on sexual and gender-based violence. The meeting brought together experts and officials from the region, as well as from Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar and Mali. It concluded with recommendations to better protect victims and ensure that the perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence were swiftly brought to justice.

V. Observations and recommendations

66. I am pleased to note that the signatories' efforts to reinvigorate the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework have yielded encouraging results.

67. I remain deeply concerned over political tensions relating to the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I reiterate my call upon all Congolese actors to exercise maximum restraint and to engage in the dialogue facilitated by the African Union. I commend the work done so far by the international support group and encourage it to continue its good offices in support of an inclusive political dialogue.

68. The continued presence of armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains a major obstacle to durable peace and security in the region. I commend FARDC for its great sacrifice in the fight against armed groups. I also welcome the steps taken by the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to help to neutralize armed groups and repatriate ex-combatants.

69. Intensified recruitment by ADF and recent massacres attributed to the group could signal an influx of external funds or the group's affiliation with foreign terror and criminal networks. I encourage the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania to establish the agreed

follow-up mechanism to tackle the threat posed by the group's expanded recruitment. In a region with a fast-growing young population, the capacity of armed groups to entice young people into criminal, extremist and terror networks must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

70. I am encouraged by the outcome of the meeting of ministers of defence, held in Nairobi on 20 July. The involvement of chiefs of defence staff to advise on ways to bolster operations against armed groups is likely to yield positive results. I also support the recommendation calling for States, corporations and individuals benefitting from illicit economic activities to be identified and sanctioned, in accordance with United Nations sanctions regimes. Furthermore, I look forward to the meeting dedicated to the illegal exploitation of natural resources by negative forces, which my Special Envoy and the ICGLR Executive Secretary are tasked with organizing.

71. I welcome the improvement of relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. I commend recent steps to strengthen bilateral relations between the three countries, in particular in the areas of security and economic cooperation. It is my hope that the recent rapprochement is a harbinger of newfound trust and stability in the region.

72. I commend the States of the region for hosting large refugee populations and for attending to their needs. I welcome initiatives that bring Governments together to explore long-term solutions to the displacement crisis in the region. I call upon the international community, as well regional and subregional organizations, to support these efforts.

73. As demonstrated by the activities of my Special Envoy and the representatives of the other guarantors, the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework continues to hold promise, notwithstanding the challenges confronting the region. For my Special Envoy to effectively support signatories in the implementation of their commitments, his Office should be granted adequate resources. The need to properly equip it was highlighted during the recent strategic review of his mandate, conducted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2277 (2016). I call upon the Security Council to endorse the recommendations of the strategic review, which I have transmitted separately.

74. Finally, I thank my Special Envoy and his Office for their continuous efforts to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. I call upon the Security Council and the international community to continue to assist the signatory States with the implementation of their commitments.